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## Responses to Mike Toupin's Article

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## RESPONSES TO MIKE TOUPIN'S ARTICLE

**Editor's note:** *In the Spring 2015 issue of JACL, we published an article by Michael Toupin titled "Characteristics of Major Donors for Bible Translation." That article reported research showing the relationship between giving and major donor categories based on age, education, marital status, and financial capacity. The most significant finding was that donors with the highest sense of involvement tended to give at the highest levels. Stated another way, those with the highest levels of giving reported the greatest levels of participation in the community of donors associated with the work of The Seed Company (an organization that supports major Bible translation work).*

*Because of the importance of development work, we invited two individuals who are heavily involved in fundraising to respond to Toupin's article: Lilya Wagner, Director of Philanthropic Service for Institutions, an internal consulting group committed to Seventh-day Adventist philanthropy; and Albert Reyes, President and CEO of Buckner International, a global Christian ministry that provides humanitarian aid. We were especially interested in adding to the understanding of what makes development work effective. Finally, we also asked Toupin to continue sharing his thinking on the rationale, nature and basic biblical grounding of philanthropic work.*

LILYA WAGNER

## **TODAY'S MAJOR DONORS: PREFERENCES AND BEHAVIORS**

The unusual mass of financial capital produced in the late 20th century, complemented by the creative thinking of innovative philanthropists, engendered new ideas for philanthropy. An entrepreneurial focus; greater emphasis on partnerships among business, government and nonprofit sectors; and new wealth as well as new social innovation dramatically affected the philanthropic scene—and therefore nonprofit organizations and fundraising.

Various definitions began to be applied to major donors, whose philanthropic practices and behaviors were gradually changing. There was talk of the “new” donor, or the “social entrepreneur,” a donor who was focused on social issues and opportunities to create and sustain social values. “Venture philanthropist” was also a frequently-used term and this type of donor, akin to the venture capitalist, valued innovation and had high demands for accountability.

Over the ensuing years, into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, high-engagement philanthropists were no longer content to write a check and let the money be invested and distributed by others. They wanted to be involved in the decision making and were looking for charitable organizations that satisfied their sense of values and need to make a difference—one of the most-cited motivations for making a major gift. They became hands-on donors, did much research about the cause to which they intended to give, and demanded accountability and results. In short, this evolution in major donor behavior resulted in today's wealthy seeking out causes for which their dollars can truly make a discernable difference. Donors to The Seed Company, as described by author Mike Toupin (2015), certainly reflect this major donor metamorphosis. Alignment with mission and vision, meeting urgent needs with lasting impact, and direct requests—these are key findings described by

Dr. Lilya Wagner is director of Philanthropic Service for Institutions, a department of the North America Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and also is affiliated with the School of Philanthropy at Indiana University. She is a frequent speaker and workshop presenter in North America and also internationally. Her many published writings include articles and book chapters on philanthropy, fundraising and the nonprofit sector.

Toupin and are congruent with what fundraising professionals have observed and researched since the mid- to late-1990s.

Many of today's major donors are under 40 and are not waiting to distribute their wealth. However, unlike traditional philanthropic practices, they don't give to just any idea that comes along or respond to an un-researched plea. They make sure (as much as possible) that their money tackles a problem which can be solved. And these preferences and behaviors are not unique to just younger philanthropists; rather, this has become a general trend in giving, particularly among major donors.

Peter deCourcy Hero (2001), writing about the emerging patterns of new philanthropy, summarized the characteristics of new donors. They select a small number or perhaps even one charitable venture; they focus on prevention and not just symptoms; they donate not just money but also time, involvement, connections and other resources; they stay involved over time; they build organizational capacity; they provide sustainability in funding; they expect agreed-upon performance measures; and they plan an exit strategy at a point when they feel they can withdraw. Toupin's (2015) research, conducted almost a decade and a half later, verifies that Hero's (2001) observations and predictions have become true.

For today's major donor, focusing on outcomes is paramount because this kind of donor doesn't "write a check and walk away." That type of charity is not appealing. He or she is interested in the potential for great changes. While "where and how I can make a difference" is a universal motivation for any donor, today's major donor puts a greater emphasis on this. Therefore it is understandable that donor behavior as researched by Toupin (2015) indicates a desire to actually see the results, to participate in mission trips and have hands-on experiences.

In mainstream philanthropy, the donor/grantee relationship often takes on a form of compliance; the nonprofit partner feels it must jump through hoops to meet certain requirements and qualify for certain funds. Of course, a great deal of today's philanthropic action continues this type of activity. However, now there is another layer to major donor behavior, one that can be observed in addition to the traditional ways of giving. Now the relationship is based on a funder's philosophy of "I will help you succeed." There is a commitment to strategic partnership. Today's major donors contribute not only their money and expertise but also their networks. They plan for maximized growth. They believe in quantitative performance assessment, investment in organizations and not just projects, significant long-term capitalization (as opposed to short-term or start-up funding), and hands-on management participation (direct participation in operating decisions and probably a seat on the nonprofit's board).

Expectations on the part of major donors are high indeed. They are motivated to give not just by their own financial ability but because they seek a cause consistent with personal values. If they don't find such a cause and the organization that embodies it, they might simply begin another nonprofit of their own, one which truly can exemplify their personal value system. Major donors are similarly concerned about and interested in the organization's reputation and the organization's performance—hence the development of projects like Fundraising Effectiveness Project (FEP) or the Fundraising Fitness Test, developed by Philanthropic Service for Institutions and based on the FEP (information available upon request). They focus grants in a specific field, and since religion or faith guide a significant portion of philanthropy (research evidence available upon request), it isn't surprising that major donors would be interested in The Seed Company. Some look at "sector investments," such as health care or the environment, and therefore it is logical to conclude that a faith-based project, regardless of the specific denomination, would be successful in seeking and finding major donor support.

This leads to another interesting aspect that underlies and also enhances Toupin's research. One of the most familiar texts in the Bible, one we not only remember from our childhood efforts to memorize key texts but also one that has taken on the air of an aphorism, is the one in Acts 20:35, where Jesus is quoted as saying that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Keeping in mind this basic biblical concept, along with numerous other texts along the same theme, we can now point to research that proves this biblical injunction.

**1. Altruism is a basic human motivation.** If it feels good to be good, it might only be natural. Neuroscientists at the National Institutes of Health scanned brains of volunteers who were asked to think about scenarios involving donating money vs. keeping it for themselves; they found that altruism is not a superior moral faculty that suppresses basic selfish urges but rather fundamental to the brain, hardwired and pleasurable (Vedantam, 2007). So major donor satisfaction in giving to The Seed Company would not be a surprising outcome.

**2. Generosity rather than acquisition promotes happiness.** A survey of 30,000 American households indicated that those who gave were 43% more likely to say they were "very happy" about their lives. The conclusion was that when people begin to give, they free themselves from the acquisitive treadmill and find new meaning (Singer, 2009). Along these same lines, *The World Giving Index*, produced by the Charities Aid Foundation in the United Kingdom, reported on the strong link between the giving of money and happiness. Happy people, studies indicate, are more likely than wealthy people to give to charity ("Giving Tied More to Happiness Than Wealth," 2010).

Therefore the story with which Toupin (2015) opens his article rings true for many fundraising professionals who have had similar and highly satisfactory experiences in making it possible for donors to give and realize happiness.

**3. Generosity results in better health.** Human beings appear to be genetically disposed to be happiest when they are selflessly giving to others, according to research conducted at the University of North Carolina. One conclusion reached was that humans tend to be unhealthy when they are devoted to self-gratification, while people who emphasize service to others and connection to community show a pattern of gene expression that results in less inflammation and stronger immunity (“A Genetic Guide to True Happiness,” 2013).

**4. Giving time has benefits similar to giving money.** *The Harvard Business Review* told of a research study conducted by Cassie Mogilner at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School which showed that people who give time away feel happier and more effective, once again underscoring the physical and mental benefits of generosity (“You’ll Feel Less Rushed If You Give Time Away,” 2012). This would be congruent with Toupin’s (2015) observation that donors like to be involved with The Seed Company and its work, a trend that has been growing both in volunteering and in giving during this century.

In summary, the concepts that drive today’s major donor are not necessarily a new creation but a variation or perhaps additional layer of major donor behavior and way of functioning. Today’s philanthropist who gives significant amounts is likely in a process of evolution shaped by current events, personal growth and development, a definition of personal values, and economy. However, characteristics which today’s major donor prefers and exhibits, while probably not revolutionary and often recognizable as standard operating procedure, put increasing emphasis and focus on credibility and accountability of nonprofit organizations, and on providing the experiences and information that produce the satisfaction and fulfillment of values which the major donor seeks.

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**ALBERT L. REYES**  
**RESPONSE TO CHARACTERISTICS  
OF MAJOR DONORS FOR BIBLE  
TRANSLATION**

Dr. Michael Toupin has done an excellent job in sharing his story in fundraising and development. His story of the conversation with Jim and Barbara mirrors many of my experiences in fundraising at Buckner International and formerly at Baptist University of the Americas. I have found that when the passion of a donor intersects with the mission of the organization I lead, exciting stewardship emerges. By the same token, I have known very passionate Christian philanthropists with astounding resources that they could contribute to our ministry, but our mission and their passion did not intersect. Dr. Toupin describes a very nice intersection that produced financial resources and kingdom results for the ministry of The Seed Company.

The work of fundraising, also referred to as development, is a ministry as valid as any other. It requires a keen focus on building relationships and wise stewardship of those relationships for high impact. Several years ago, I was encouraging a young minister to consider this field of ministry. His response to my encouragement sort of surprised me. “No, I am not interested in that type of work,” he said. “I don’t want to become a professional beggar.” I was disappointed that he viewed the work of development in this way. My view could not be further from this perspective. I see development work as stewardship. It is a sacred stewardship of the relationship with the donor and the potential financial resource, as well as the gifts, abilities, and time available from the donor. I see my role in development as solving the challenge of what to do with discretionary and excess resources. Many of the donors I work with see their gifts as “Kingdom investments” and they have an expectation of a return on their investment.

The writer of Ecclesiastes said, “For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it” (2:21, NIV). Wise donors know they must carefully choose how to invest excess resources for Kingdom purposes that may continue producing results after they have passed away. My role is to invite them to be

Albert Reyes, Ph.D., is President of Buckner International in Dallas, Texas. Buckner is one of the oldest and most unique faith-based social service organizations of its kind, serving hundreds of thousands of people each year in the United States and around the world. His most recent book, *The Jesus Agenda: Becoming An Agent of Redemption*, empowers us with the knowledge that as Christ followers we must reconcile conviction with compassion, sanctification with service, and truth with love.

a part of the Buckner International ministry to transform lives and change the world. Far from the idea of begging, I raise a challenge, perhaps even the notion of a calling, to collaborate with us to serve the needs of vulnerable children, orphans, and their families. We are on a mission and we invite generous people who are motivated by their faith to make a difference in the world.

Donors who contribute to Buckner tend to have a deep passion for the well-being of vulnerable children, orphans, and their families. They are compelled by their faith. Donors interested in funding foster care and adoption long to ensure that children who have suffered abuse, neglect, and abandonment have an opportunity to grow up in a healthy family. Donors who fund Family Pathways have a passion for mothers that suffer domestic abuse and violence or find themselves in difficult economic conditions and need a hand up. I have heard countless stories of domestic violence and mothers with very little hope for the future. These strong and brave women turn to Buckner for help, and within two years most graduate from the program with a sense of mission and purpose, an associate degree, and a way to maintain their family finances. Donors who fund families through Buckner Family Hope Centers have a passion to see the total redemptive potential of a family become reality. These programs fund case managers to plug the gaps in the lives of families to preserve the family unit and prevent the disintegration of the family. In turn, this protects thousands of children from entering the Child Welfare System. These programs are found all over Texas and in eight countries around the world. Donors joyfully give to these programs because they can see and read stories of redemptive transformation.

Exciting stewardship happens when the passion of the donor and the mission of the organization intersect in the context of a relationship of trust and confidence. Toupin underscored this truth in the Findings section of his article, under the heading “Alignment with Mission and Vision.” Another factor to consider is the personhood of the leader of the ministry and the development leader. Donors tend to give to missional leaders they trust, respect, and in whom they have high confidence. They also give to a compelling vision. A leader who can articulate a clear and compelling vision of the future of the organization and the kingdom impact their ministry will make will usually have success in attracting needed resources. In this article, Dr. Toupin provides a compelling case for support for The Seed Company. He clearly states the need, the history, and the future of The Seed Company and why generous philanthropy is needed to support his mission.

Finally, one of the basic principles in development is that one tends to obtain the next gift from the same source from which they received the first gift. That is, donors may become repeat contributors if the results they



expected are executed with a high level of excellence. At Buckner International, we ensure that our major donors receive a stewardship report annually. This report outlines the impact of their gift and is an opportunity to demonstrate our accountability to the donor; it also sets the stage for an additional request for funding. Additionally, I have found that many donors would support our ministry but have never been asked or invited to do so. Toupin documented the impact of a “Direct Request” in his Findings section.

Toupin’s study found an interesting factor referred to as “Communities of Participation.” He found this factor to be the single highest discriminant value between donor categories. He also found that when “communities of participation” and the factor of “leadership” were combined, these two factors became the most powerful discriminant between donor levels in this study. My experience in development at Buckner International and at Baptist University of the Americas confirms this finding. At Buckner, we find that people who tend to financially support our ministry do so because they are compelled by their faith to make a difference in the world. When our donors spend their time with other donors on mission trips, shoe drives, or trips where they place shoes on the feet of children, a sense of unity develops among participants. Relationships develop as they get to know other people who share the same values, vision, and passion through our ministry. In the past 15 years, Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls has collected 3 million pairs of shoes and has shipped them to more than 80 countries to bless vulnerable children. Many of these shoes were carried by volunteers who put the shoes on the children themselves. Many lifelong relationships have been developed within the context of serving “the least of these.”

About twice a year, I lead a group of prospective donors on a vision trip to one of the eight countries where Buckner serves in Africa or Latin America. Most recently, I led a group to Guatemala. I knew all of the prospective donors with the exception of one. However, they did not know each other. We visited Buckner work, government officials, Buckner staff, pastors, and local leaders as well as our clients. By midway through the week, members of this group became acquainted and built friendships.

Recently, I led a group of Buckner donors, friends, and prospective donors to the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC. Global leaders from 130 countries and every state in the United States gathered as guests of the U.S. Congress and the President of the United States. Over a period of three days, we met several senators, members of Congress, Chaplain (Admiral) Barry Black (62<sup>nd</sup> Chaplain of the U.S. Senate), as well as ambassadors and government officials from around the world. I invited this group of Buckner friends to enjoy the National Prayer Breakfast but also to engage global

leaders on behalf of Buckner during that week. In a matter of three intense days, members of this group became friends, like family. Why? They most likely formed friendships and a sense of community because we formed a community of participation around the mission of Buckner. Their commitment and passion for Buckner ministry grew dramatically in those few days. Several of the leaders who went to the National Prayer Breakfast as my guests made commitments to travel with me on future President's Vision Trips this year, during which I will introduce them, as new prospective donors, to Buckner ministry.

Toupin's study is an encouraging and wise word to those who serve in development. Few experiences measure up to the joy of inviting donors to support work that makes a Kingdom impact. This is only surpassed by the joy of reporting excellent results and changed lives, and experiencing the joy of faithful stewards who share their resources to bring the Kingdom of God very near in the "here and now" as well as the "yet to be."

## **MIKE TOUPIN CHARACTERISTICS OF MAJOR DONORS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATION—PART 2**

This is the second of two articles connected to research around major financial donors who give to the cause of Bible translation through The Seed Company. Published in the Spring 2015 issue of *JACL*, the first article began with the story of Jim and Barbara, whose lives were transformed through their giving. The sense of transformation they experienced is not uncommon—it is a value worth striving toward in the work of development. It reminds me of two other families whom, for the sake of anonymity, we will simply call the Smiths and Johnsons.

We had come to know the Smiths through the Johnsons, who were already significant donors to the cause. In The Seed Company, the most prolific way we have met new major donor prospects is clearly through existing major donor peers. The Johnsons had introduced many of their peers to the ministry of Bible translation, and this introduction was a natural extension of those connections. The relationship between the Smiths and Johnsons underscores the value of friendship and community in the world of financial development.

Mike Toupin has served with Wycliffe Bible Translators and The Seed Company for nearly 30 years. His service has spanned numerous areas in Bible translation, adult literacy, major donor fundraising, and organizational leadership.

The Smiths were responsible for inherited and earned wealth. They were not new to the world of business or charitable giving, nor were they naïve in either area. After learning about the cause and meeting key leaders of The Seed Company, they became significant partners with the organization, providing the proverbial gifts of “time, talent and treasure” to the work. The opportunity to make a difference seemed important to them, and their investment of “treasure” quickly surpassed the \$100,000 level. Then, after becoming donors themselves, they went on to introduce the work to their sphere of friendships.

The Smiths’ connection to the ministry seemed deeply meaningful to them. Their involvement had moved beyond any sense of transaction into the realm of transformation. Further, they identified with the work at a core level, using inclusive language of “we” and “us” when talking about the organization. Discussions with them were also profoundly spiritual.

We had a revealing meeting with the family soon after they committed their first \$100,000. The meeting took place over a meal at their country club’s dining facility. Early in the discussion, we shared a report about the impact of their gifts. They were visibly moved; Mrs. Smith was choking back a waterfall of tears. We began to express our gratitude, but Mrs. Smith interrupted the report: “No, please don’t thank us. It should be the other way around. We should be thanking you for giving us the opportunity to join God in what He is doing through this ministry.”

We agreed together that the best plan of action was for all of us to simply thank God for letting us serve together. The Smiths have given time, major financial gifts, and significant organizational benefits through their business. Over the years, we’ve come to realize that they feel closer to God as they reach out to others through the ministry. They feel a sense of personal impact, growth in their spiritual life, and identification with the cause. They feel that their lives have been transformed, even as Bibleless communities are being impacted. As we will see, hearts tend to follow treasure.

## **Fundraising as Ministry**

Schervish and Whitaker (2010) point out that wealthy individuals are motivated to give for reasons that are spiritual, but not necessarily religious in the sense of being the obligation of a particular religious activity (Schervish, 2012; Schervish & Whitaker, 2010). The idea of ministry connected to major donors through fundraising may therefore extend beyond organized religion; it may include a spiritual component, whether done in a particularly religious context or not.

However, having said this, the Bible explicitly encourages Christians to

give through personal and organized aspects their faith. They are to give for the care of the poor, widows, orphans, and the sick; to feed the hungry; to provide help for the imprisoned; and to support religious aspects of the faith related to worship, mission and discipleship (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 6:1-7; 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 9:1-18; 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9; Luke 10:7; 1 Tim. 5:18; Gal. 6:6; Rom. 15:24; and Phil. 4:10-20). These verses related to stewardship are not isolated topics in the New Testament; rather, this understanding flows directly from Jesus' emphasis on the subject. As Grimm (1992) reminds us, Jesus spoke more about stewardship in the Gospels than any other topic:

If we were to strike the comments of Jesus about money, we would reduce his teaching by more than one-third. Sixteen of Jesus' approximately thirty-eight parables dealt with money. One of every seven verses in the first three Gospels in some way deals with money. In fact, Jesus spoke about money more than about any other single subject, except the kingdom of God itself. Perhaps this was because Jesus understood how money itself can become a god. His assertions, "You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matt 6:24) and, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt 6:21) indicate his awareness of the preemptive role played by money in the lives of people. (p. 19)

The practice of personal philanthropy in today's Christian culture is frequently described as stewardship (Jeavons & Basinger, 2000). Psalm 24:1 reminds us that "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him" (NLT). The concept of biblical stewardship is derived from the premise that God, as Creator, owns everything in the universe (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-4) and that we, as His creatures designed to reflect His image, are responsible to manage creation for the greater good. In this sense, Christians do not act as owners but rather as stewards of God's possessions, sharing His joy in the process of giving.

Numerous Christian authors attribute a ministry-type of transformation that occurs within individuals who participate in the area of stewardship (Gravelle, 2014; Grimm, 1992; "*The Lausanne Movement*," 2011; Lindsay & Wuthnow, 2010; Nouwen, 2004). Willmer (2008) defines this transformational process as a five-stage pathway to generosity that begins when individuals acknowledge their own nature and ultimately, through a process of growth, reflect Christ's nature of generosity (see Table 1). From this premise the apostle Paul admonished Christians in Corinth to strategically follow through in their pledges to give financial aid toward the needs of poor believers in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 9:7-15).

Table 1. *Wilmer's Five-Stage Transformational Model*

Stage	Transformation Activity
5	Implement Genuine Generosity as Christ Is Generous
4	Become Conformed to Christ's Image
3	Choose God's Eternal Kingdom over the Earthly Kingdom
2	Accept Christ's Offer of Transformation
1	Acknowledge Our Sinful, Self-Centered Nature

Note: Adapted from *Revolution in Generosity: Transforming Stewards to Be Rich Toward God* (p. 31), by W. K. Wilmer (Ed.), 2008, Chicago, IL: Moody.

Notably, within this passage the apostle Paul describes giving as ministry. The connection between givers and ministry reveals the spiritual importance of giving for both the donor and the fundraiser. Jeavons and Basinger (2000) reflect this scriptural admonition when they say that Christian fundraising “must also be concerned about nurturing the spiritual life and participation in a spiritual community, out of which generosity may grow” (p. 34), and that fundraisers “should be creating relationships with donors wherein the act of giving can become for the donors an occasion both to feel and to celebrate their faith, their sense of God at work in their lives” (p. 35).

Author Henri Nouwen (2004) was emphatic about the connection between fundraising and ministry, as expressed in a sermon with family friends which was converted into a booklet after his death. Nouwen spoke to the spirituality of fundraising:

As a form of ministry, fund-raising is as spiritual as giving a sermon, entering a time of prayer, visiting the sick, or feeding the hungry . . . . Fund-raising is a very rich and beautiful activity. It is a confident, joyful, and hope-filled expression of ministry. In ministering to each other, each of us from the riches that he or she possesses, we work together for the full coming of God's Kingdom. (pp. 6, 47)

I agree wholeheartedly with the authors above. You may recall the experience of Jim and Barbara in the preceding article (Toupin, 2015), or the Smiths and Johnsons from this article. Their stories are not unique among major donors. They demonstrate the kind of joyful spiritual growth that many stewards experience. The activities around stewardship can also provide a joyful experience for the organizations that serve them. Jim and Barbara, the Smiths, and the Johnsons all felt that they were given a precious gift from God through their stewardship. Ministry-based organizations have the privilege of

serving these major donors in their journey of faith. This reality has led me to define the ministry of development as a focus on financial stewardship in which we help connect God's people to God's work in godly ways.

## Starting Well—Growing Well

Several implications for enhancing development practices for organizations arise from the findings recorded in my first article (Toupin, 2015). First, the leaders in the organization should start with an honest assessment of their philosophy for development. Do they see the work of development as a genuine act of ministry and treat it with that kind of priority? Or do they view it simply as a means to a desired end? Serving from a solid biblical foundation will enhance the experience for everyone concerned.

Next, given the high value for communities of participation, organizations should consider staffing their development team with individuals who have specific gifts or skill sets in the area of building community around the major donor segment. Whether it is development representatives, event specialists or other staff, it seems that an immediate enhancement to development programs will be realized by hiring and training staff to help build community.

The “cultivation cycle” (Smith, 1993), perhaps the best known and most frequently adapted approach to donor relationships practiced by nonprofit organizations, is based on the “Five I’s”: *identification*, *information*, *interest*, *involvement*, and *investment* (see Figure 1). Customization of the approach provides numerous opportunities to enhance your development service.

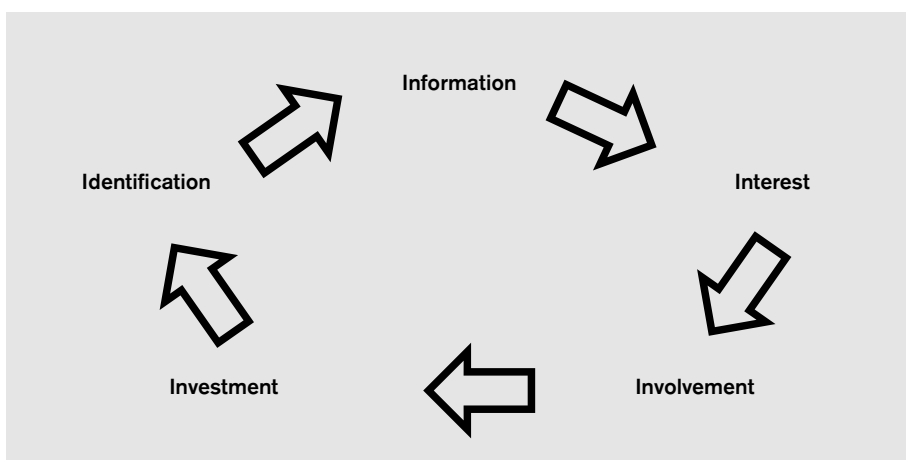


Figure 1. The Cultivation Cycle.

## Identification

*Identification* is the first need when starting a development program. Organizations must identify a significant pool of major donor prospects in order to grow the donor base. My study (Toupin, 2015) reveals that high-level donors tend to leverage their influence to invite others into the experience. Programs that promote peer-to-peer introductions between major donors should be an ongoing priority for the organization. The options for improving your identification strategy range from development representative training to ambassadorial programs specifically designed to attract peer-to-peer prospecting and acquisition. The organization's public relations materials can also focus effectively on the community experienced between donor peers.

## Information

The *information* aspect of the cultivation cycle requires gathering of demographic data and interests for each major donor. Development representatives can provide great value through sensitive queries around donors' concerns and perceptions of the organization and its practices. Documenting these insights along with publicly available information is essential. Conversely, managing information flow to prospects and donors in light of their preferences will help build donor participation and passion.

## Interest

Qualifying donors' and prospects' *interest* is the next step in the cycle. It is important to determine their interest in the organization as a whole as well as its specific programs. The organization's relationship managers should be trained and encouraged to seek and document appropriate insights during purposeful visits and conversations with the donor. Ambassadors may also be trained to listen for clues as to the interests of their peers. The interest of donors and prospects must be qualified not only in terms of programs, but in terms of how they prefer to make their contributions. Some will appreciate the face-to-face approach more than others. Some will appreciate the opportunity to give through events more than others. The target should be to learn as much as possible within a healthy relationship.

## Involvement

The next step in the cultivation cycle is *involvement*. It seems that we touch on this aspect in almost every consideration of the work. Involvement provides a first-hand sense of knowledge and experience with the organization. An organization has a great opportunity to promote a mutually transformational relationship through shared experiences. In practical terms,

this could mean developing meaningful programs to let prospects and donors see and experience the organization's work in a variety of settings. These programs should include additional training for peer-to-peer and ambassador-type programs, with an intentional focus on events and activities that promote a sense of community. The variety of events should include many that are not specifically for fund raising, but rather for relationship building and exploring the qualification of the interest. The effectiveness of these approaches should be measured, with a particular focus on acquisition of new qualified prospects. The idea is to build an environment for healthy relationships between the organization and its donors as well as between the donors and their peers.

### *Invitation*

The final step in the cultivation cycle is the *invitation* to make a financial contribution. My study (Toupin, 2015) revealed that higher-level donors appreciate the value of direct requests as well as the possibility of leveraging donations through matching gift programs. Two effective approaches for the invitation are face-to-face requests and requests made in the context of a major donor event. Obviously, it would be wise to provide team training in both approaches.

In summary, the cultivation cycle represents a continuous pattern of growth for the donor's relationship with the organization. Giving generally occurs after the potential donor becomes attracted to the work and involved at some level. Generosity tends to grow over time as awareness and involvement increase. At this point, the passionate donor is often excited about introducing the organization to peers, which provides the most powerful context for new donor acquisition. The end result is a sense of active identification and involvement with a community of peers who share a similar passion for the cause.

### **Conclusion**

For the organization that seeks to conceptualize and implement these practices, a primary focus should be to aggressively build programs that enhance a sense of community among major donors. These programs do more than build donor involvement; for many major donors, the programs provide a platform for deepening their experience of the other key attributes revealed in my study. Hearts tend to follow treasure. Friends tend to link arms with friends. Ministry and deepening spiritual life take place for everyone involved: the organization, the recipients of the organization's services, and the unique giving community which propels the work forward.



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